No. 31

The REDEMPTION of Marie Gordon

THE TRAGIC STORY OF
WRONGED WOMANHOOD

Price 10¢

"When I seemed tired and somewhat discouraged, she would sit on my lap, and in a short time made me forget the hard knocks of the day."
R. of M. G., No. 31.

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NEITHER Guy nor Ruth Fillmore had a thought of the danger which often lurks in this wilderness. But they were brought face to face with it in the most unexpected and the most dramatic manner.

One morning, as Ruth sat in the shade of some gigantic trees, she suddenly experienced a feeling of uneasiness.

Through the thin cluster of foliage she caught sight of a man, not twenty paces away from her. He was not a pleasant individual to look at.

And he stood studying her quite as intently as she was studying him. She thought at first that he was a game warden.

But her speculation was cut short by his peremptory advance. He was at her side even before she could scramble to her feet.

She took a firm hold of the rifle resting against the tree, but the man snatched it away from her with a brutal jerk. As he did so, he muttered something under his breath that sounded like an oath.

"What are you doing with that gun?" he demanded.

"Shoot with it, of course," she replied with cool dignity. "My husband just went down that path to scare up something."

The man backed away with the rifle, which he examined eagerly. Then he gazed at the path indicated by Ruth. She retreated a step before his leering eyes.

"So you have a husband around here, eh?" he said with a hardening of the mouth that sent an unpleasant chill up her spine.

"Yes, he is just over the hill," she answered with an effort at self-assurance.

"You are a camper, aren't you?"

"Yes," Ruth admitted.

As she regarded the man she saw that he was younger than he at first appeared.

His sweat-stained clothing and a five-day growth of beard gave him an appearance of ferocity which seemed contradicted by the plaintive haggardness of his eyes.

"Got anything to eat around here?" was his next question.

The woman opened her belt pouch and lifted out her compact ration of dried beef and bread and sweet chocolate.

The man took it all, eating the chocolate first. Then he devoured the dried meat and bread, wiping his mouth with the back of his hand as he finished.

"I've got to do one of two things," he said without emotion. "I either will have to shoot you, or take you along with me."

Ruth strove desperately to preserve at least an outward air of calmness.

"Why one or the other?" she tremulously inquired. She backed away as she spoke, unconscious of the movement until she saw that the man followed her step by step.

"I trust no woman," was his sharp retort.

"That means that you are being followed, is that not so?" she exclaimed. "You have committed some crime and you are running away. You are a fugitive from justice."

"It means that I am not going to be taken alive," the man said with a quiet intensity that made her shudder in spite of herself.

"But I have not the slightest desire to interfere with your freedom," Ruth protested.

"That is easy to say," he barked back at her.

"But if I promise," she temporized, hoping that Guy might come as she prolonged the argument. "If I give you my word of honor that——"

"I am taking chances with no woman," he cut in.

The young wife stood silent a moment. Her fingers slowly opened and closed. What was she to do?

This brute meant every word he said. He had told her that she either would have to go with him or be killed.

"Well, what do you want to do?" he snarled, raising the rifle to his shouldler. "It is up to you. If you refuse to accompany me, I'll have to put a bullet through you, much as I hate to do it."

"I'll go," she answered.

She spoke so low that he hardly heard her. Ruth knew that her decision was a momentous one.

And she shuddered before the listless nod of the man's head. Her capitulation had evidently meant so little to him. He would probably have shot her where she stood, promptly and without compunction, merely to insure his own escape. He would have killed her, at the first sign that she was crossing his will.

It was a frightful thing to follow this outlaw, and yet there was no evading it.

He had confessed that he was being hunted and that he would not be taken alive. She prayed silently that her husband would come before it was too late.

She glanced in every direction, her heart beating way up in her throat. The man was watching her intently.

"Well?" he cried, "are you ready?"

Ruth gave a slight nod.

"Then let's be moving," was the man's curt command. He pointed with the rifle barrel. "You go first and keep going. I'll follow."

"Where?" Ruth found the courage to ask.

"Where I say," he told her.

She stumbled forward, her head up and her hands clenched, with a vague feeling of nausea in the pit of her stomach.

She tried to fortify herself with the claim that the man's face, for all its ferocity, held an undeniable air of pathos.

And she found some consolation in remembering that he had at least given her a chance to live. The very question he had put to her implied that he had some ghostly form of chivalry.

He was tired and he would have to sleep. And some time, in some manner, her chance to escape would come.

What she must do, every moment, was to be wary and watchful. She could hear his heavy footsteps behind her. He was coming closer and closer.

What if he attacked her? Who was there to prevent it in this wilderness.

Ruth gave a gasp as the thought came to her. Yes, she was helplessly in the man's power.

On and on she walked, occasionally glancing over her shouldler. The expression on his face was fierce.

She tried to think of some weapon she might use in defending herself. She had none, not even a hatpin.

"Do you know if there is a boat of any kind about here?" he asked as they approached the river.

"We have a canoe we use for fishing up there," she replied.

"How far up there?" he demanded.

"About a mile and a half."

"Alright," exclaimed her captor. "We'll get that canoe. Head for it, and head straight. And don't try any tricks. If you try to run away from me I'll put a

bullet through your back."

It was the cool impersonality of the man's threat, more than anything else, that impressed Ruth.

It had been her intention to circle about and chose a path that would lead them back to camp.

But she could not chance it now. She would be shot from behind if she attempted to lead her captor into a trap.

Then there was double danger. This man was a desperate character. Even if she succeeded in leading him to where her husband was, he would kill Guy without hesitation.

She stumbled on. Another look over her shoulder warned her that the outlaw kept her covered with the rifle.

Then all of a sudden three shots rang out with about five seconds between each report. Ruth gave a start. She knew who fired those shots.

Her husband had returned to camp and found her gone. It was the pre-arranged signal. It was also a signal of distress which she was to give in case of need.

But she could not answer, for her rifle was in the hands of the outlaw. Again three shots were fired.

"Who is doing that shooting?" her captor demanded, hastening his steps and catching up with her. "Is it—is it your husband?"

"No," fibbed the woman. "It is probably one of the guides."

"Then the sooner we get out of this part of the country, the better," he proclaimed.

Then they reached the bank of the river. The canoe Ruth had spoken of lay close. Ruth waited with her head bowed, wondering if the outlaw meant to cross over to the other side.

"Get into that canoe," he commanded.

Still Ruth waited. To the right there came a sudden crackling in the underbrush, and a moment later a man mounted on a superb horse hove into view.

But the outlaw had seen him too. He swiftly withdrew a few paces, keeping the woman covered.

"That man is a member of the Canadian mounted police," he told her in a tone, quiet, but nevertheless menacing. "He will most likely ask you if you saw me. You tell him that you have not, and also that you are alone.

"I'll be hiding in there," indicating a clump of underbrush. "If you fail to do exactly as I tell you, I'll drill you through the head. Now obey me to the letter. If you don't you know what will happen."

As he spoke he backed away and he added:

"Did you understand me? I'll kill you and that damned bloodhound, too. No tricks now, remember. You understood?"

"I understood you perfectly," replied Ruth, her eyes still on the advancing horseman.

She forced a smile as the latter drew rein in front of her. He was rather a handsome fellow with sky blue eyes and a humorous twist about his mouth.

There was not the least doubt in her mind but that the outlaw would make good his threat.

And what a pity it would be if this soldierly man lost his life because of her.

"Well, I'll be darned!" the newcomer exclaimed. "Who are you?"

"I am a camper at Point Claire," she answered.

"And what's your name?"

"Ruth Fillmore."

"Hunting here?"

She nodded.

"Got a license?"

Again she nodded.

"Let's see it."

Luckily she had the required slip of paper with her. The officer examined it and inclined his head as a token of satisfaction.

"But this license mentioned Mr. and Mrs. G. Fillmore," he said as an afterthought. "How do you happen to be alone? Don't you know that you are taking a frightful chance in loitering about the river by yourself?"

"Oh, I am not afraid," Ruth declared evenly. "My husband is not far off."

"Are you sure you saw no other man about this neighborhood?" the horseman inquired. "I mean an outlaw, a rough-looking customer, with about a week's growth of whiskers on his face. He answers to the name of Carter."

Ruth shook her head and met the man's searching gaze without flinching.

"Not that I remember," she retorted.

"Well, if you did, you probably would be sorry, Mrs. Fillmore," was the slow response. "Carter is one of the most desperate characters in the country. I advise you not to be alone much. There is no telling what he might do to a beautiful young woman like you. He has killed three people already."

"Then why don't you get him?" She could not resist the ironic shaft. "You are a Canadian police officer, aren't you?"

"Yes, I am," the other confessed, "and we'll get Carter within the next twelve hours."

It seemed strange that Ruth could find enough courage to laugh in a situation like this. But laugh she did, and the officer gave her a quick glance.

"What's the joke?" he demanded, then, an instant later, his tone softened as he saw the tears starting to

her eyes. "You —— you have been telling me the truth haven't you? And if for any reason you are afraid, why say the word and I'll stay with you until your——"

Ruth interrupted him a little hysterically:

"No, I am not a bit afraid. Don't worry about me please don't. I am going right back to our camp and you must follow that outlaw"

The officer gave her another look. Then he touched his hat, put the spurs to the horse and rode rapidly away.

Chapter 100

THE ENDLESS TRAIL

RUTH FILLMORE waited without moving. She stood so long alone and without hearing from her captor that a forlorn hope welled up in her breast. She had begun to believe that the outlaw had quietly made his escape, and that she was free to find the way back to the camp.

But the next instant she saw a hairy, lean face slowly emerge from the tangle of underbrush. One glance assured her that it was her abductor.

The fugitive's attitude was abstracted, almost pensive, as he stood waist-high in the shrubbery staring after the disappearing officer. He was holding his rifle ready for instant use.

It made Ruth realize how easily this brute could have killed her. The prospect of such a crime, in fact, seemed scarcely to have disturbed her.

He even grinned somewhat sarcastically as he strode toward her. Within a few feet he stopped.

"You played your part pretty well," he told her. "Now let's be off, this particular neighborhood is not healthy."

Ruth could not keep down a rebellious spirit.

"I think we ought to reach some sort of an understanding," she protested. "I don't think it is fair for you to drag me all over this——"

"There is just one understanding between us," he cut her short. "And that is for you to play fair with me if you want to keep alive. If you try to double-cross me, I'll put a neat little hole in the back of your head. Now

that goes, young lady."

Her face colored crimson.

"But aren't you demanding a great deal of me?" she cried.

The fugitive laughed for the first time. And it was not a pleasant laugh.

"Say, my dear girl," he replied, "I fought in France, and I know what war is. And you can call this war. But I want to set you straight about one thing. I am not going to—to take advantage of you, even though you are a devilishly pretty young woman.

"I have not yet fallen that low. You are safe with me so far as that goes. I am generally regarded as an outcast from decent society, but I still know how to respect decent womanhood.

"A while ago that mounted police officer gave me a bad record. He told you that I had killed three people. Well, it is true, but it was forced on me. But as I said before, you are safe. Play fair with me, and I'll treat you decent. Oppose me, and I won't answer for what happens."

Ruth looked him squarely in the eyes as he spoke, and somehow she felt that he was sincere.

Some of her fears vanished. But there was the worry as to when this journey with the outlaw was to end. What if he kept her out over night?

What sort of an explanation could she make to her husband?

"Alright, let's go." The man poked the rifle barrel into her ribs.

She was silent as she led him toward the canoe. They both got in, she first.

"Can you paddle?" he asked.

"Yes," she acknowledged.

"What is in that box over there?" he wanted to

know, pointing at the square object on the bank which had escaped observation.

"My husband keeps his fishing tackle in there," Ruth informed him.

"We will take it along," the fugitive decided. "We will probably need a catch of fish for food. And I'll also take that chain and the padlock which was used to fasten the canoe to the stake."

Ruth Fillmore's face went crimson. She surmised even before she saw the man's face, the use to which he intended to put the chain and lock.

"Do you think you need to go that far?" she challenged.

"I told you once before that I am not going to take any chances," he growled. "I am still a free man, and I expect to remain so. I never knew a woman yet who could be trusted implicity."

She watched the outlaw with distended eyes as he took possession of the fishing tackle and the chain and lock.

"Alright, let's paddle it," he said.

Ruth Fillmore paddled the bow and the outlaw paddled the stern as the canoe made its cautious way down the wide stream. Along the canoe-bottom between them lay the loaded rifle.

It was a desolate country through which they passed, scarred now and then with black stumpage of forest fires.

But the fugitive, Ruth noticed, was always on the alert. When they caught sight of an old man fishing, he lay flat in the bottom of the frail craft and ordered her to keep on paddling.

How long they drifted down the river, Ruth was unable to guess. Hour after hour passed, and finally, as the sun set, they rowed ashore into the shelter of a

pine grove.

When Ruth returned to the water's edge to wash her hands, the outlaw kept her covered with the rifle. When they gathered wood and built a fire, he held the weapon in constant readiness.

They seldom spoke, for there seemed small need of speech between them now.

Not until they had eaten their evening meal of broiled fish did Ruth venture to break the painful silence.

"Has it ever occurred to you that you are carrying me a long way from — from my husband?" she asked.

The man grinned hideously.

"Has it ever occurred to you," was his counter-demand, "that I am treating you a darned sight better than I did the other people who interfered with my traveling?"

Ruth sat silent for a long moment.

"When I think over the entire situation," she finally proclaimed, "it seems to me that the other way might have been the more merciful."

The man looked up at her sharply as she finished that speech, obviously bewildered by the bitterness in her voice. For a little while he studied her intently. At last he said with something like pity in his eyes:

"What makes you say that?"

"I was thinking of — of my husband when I go back to him," she murmured, a tear gathering at her lashes. "He is not much different from other husbands you know. I could never make him believe that you—you did not——"

The outlaw laughed boisterously.

"I suppose he'd try to kill me for this?"

"He most assuredly would kill you," was Ruth's low reply.

"Does he love you?"

She hung her head.

"Yes."

"Do you love him?"

"More than my life."

"Is he jealous of you?"

"I—I try not to give him any reasons to be," she answered. "But you are placing me in a horrible position. Do you expect me to—to spend the night here with you?"

"Why, that is understood." He regarded her, curiously, then burst into another laugh. "But you need have no fear."

"Thanks for that assurance," Ruth said, trying vainly to keep back the tears. "But my husband will not be so easily convinced after I get back to him. He'll want to take after you and kill you."

"Don't you worry about that, my dear young woman. He will never get near enough to me to do that, and I would advise him not to get too close. I am looking out for myself on this trip. He may be a good shot from a distance, but I'll beat him to it."

"I know you are looking out for yourself," she responded, stifling a sob, "but you don't think what you are doing to me and my life."

He shrugged his shoulders.

"What I told you before pretty well covers our case, Mrs. Fillmore. This is war. And when you are fighting for your life you can't be too finicky about how you do your fighting."

"But I had no part in this warfare of yours, Mr. Carter."

"No, you hadn't," the fugitive admitted. "That is true enough. You were a civilian, so to speak, a civilian who happened to get between the lines of fire.

And so to save your neck I had to drag you along with me as I go.

"And I am sorry I am taking you away from that husband of yours. But I guess he'd rather lose you for a few days than lose you for life."

"I am not so sure about that," observed the woman.

"Well, we will have to sleep on it anyway," said the outlaw as he reached for the canoe chain and padlock.

He looped one end of the chain about her ankle and the other about his own, padlocking it in place. She winced at his touch, but it was useless to attempt to evade him.

As his hand touched a little above her ankle she gave a little scream.

"Cut it out!" he hissed. "I am not going to harm you!"

Ruth was more frightened than ever at the vicious manner in which he spoke. It was a horrible position to be placed in.

She thought of her husband, wondering how far he might be away.

She felt sure that he went in search of her. Before she reclined on the pine needles she glanced at her captor. His one hand clutched the rifle, while the other lay across his breast.

His general attitude was that of a man tired to death.

"I don't suppose it is of any use to ask you to take that chain off my ankle," Ruth ventured.

"No, it isn't," he replied gruffly.

"Not even if I give you my word of honor that I will not attempt to escape during the night?"

A sudden crackling among the underbrush caused

the outlaw to keep back a reply. He swiftly crouched low, the rifle ready for instant use.

A moment later a frightened hare ran through the clearing. With a sigh of relief he turned to his fair captive.

"You better lay down and get some sleep," he told her, his voice toned down considerably. "I am sorry I have to impose that inconvenience upon you," indicating the chain. "But I am forced to it."

Ruth was on the verge of bursting into tears.

As she lay, her eyes wide and staring, she realized that the chance of slipping away from the man while he slept, was gone.

She yielded to the inevitable, her lips quivering and her nerves on edge.

During the greater part of the night she strove to keep awake. The outlaw appeared intensely alert. At every noise he would sit up and reach for the rifle.

Toward morning both, utterly exhausted fell into a troubled sleep.

When Ruth opened her eyes the sun had risen. Her captor was no longer chained to her. A short distance away he sat beside a fire which burned briskly.

"You better go down the river and wash," he told her when he saw her struggle to her feet. "I'll wait for you. But remember that I am keeping an eye on you. And it might be just as well if you left those shoes of yours behind with me."

She did as she had been ordered, and without answering him. But her heart lightened as she went toward the river. It was chivalrous of him not to want to accompany her.

Seated at the water's edge she took off her stockings and began bathing her aching feet.

Suddenly her attention was attracted to a large

size canoe which swiftly came toward her. It was being paddled by two sullen half-breeds.

In it sat two officers of the Canadian provincial police with rifles in their hands and cartridge belts across their shoulders.

They drew up beside her before the astonishment faded out of her face.

"What are you doing here?" asked one of the officers.

"Camping," was her curt retort, resenting as she did that officer's prolonged stare at her shapely bare ankles.

"Are you alone?" was the next question.

"At the moment, yes."

"Why do you say at the moment?"

This last inquiry stumped Ruth. She did not dare tell who was with her, for from the ridge of the little hill a rifle barrel pointed straight at her head.

"Why did you say at the moment?" the officer repeated impatiently.

"Because my camp-mates happen to be bathing in the river below the bend there," she fibbed.

"Are they women?"

"Yes."

The two officers indulged in a whispered conversation. Finally the inquisitive one said rather gruffly:

"This is no time for you women to be roaming about here. There is an outlaw at large. And if he happens to find you here alone and unprotected, there will be something worse than murder to report."

"We are not at all afraid," replied Ruth.

"No, you are not," the officer grinned amiably. "You seem to have plenty of spunk. Just the same I suggest that you and the others with you keep under cover until we have rounded up our man."

She nodded thoughtfully.

"Which way are you traveling?" she asked.

"Up the stream toward Lac Grenier," answered the officer. "Wait!" he cried, stopping the paddlers with a gesture of his hand. "Have you seen anyone go up or down the river during the last two days?"

Ruth stood silent for a moment. She longed to tell the truth but she dared not.

"I saw an old Indian fishing," she acknowledged. "He isn't the man you are after, is he?"

"Not by a long shot," came back briskly, with another gesture to the paddlers to proceed. "Well, goodby and remember my warning. Tell those friends of yours about the danger you are in and stick close to your own camp."

Chapter 101

DESPERATION

A FEELING of relief swept over Ruth as she watched the canoe go up the river and finally disappeared. She finished washing and slowly made her way up the hill. As she expected she found herself confronted by the outlaw, squatted in a clump of underbrush, with a dewing of sweat on his furrowed forehead.

His balanced rifle stock was held close against his ribs. His revolver, removed from its holster, was gripped in his left hand.

Neither spoke as he rose to his feet and stepped aside to let her pass. He remained silent as he followed her back to the camp fire, which he deliberately smothered with loose earth scraped up by his feet.

Then he wiped his face with a ragged sleeve.

"Why did you tell those officers all that?" he inquired as he sat down on the pine needles, with a look of pathos in his face.

Ruth found the question a hard one to answer.

"I—I told them that because I did not want any more killing," she finally replied, without permitting her glance to meet his. "Not that I was afraid of losing my own life. I don't care about that—now. I did not want those two officers murdered in cold blood."

The fugitive sat silent for several minutes. Then he rose heavily to his feet.

"Well, I guess we better be on our way," was all he said as he restored the revolver to its holster and crossed over to where the canoe lay on its side.

With his back turned to Ruth he waited until she had drawn on her stockings and laced her shoes.

He did not turn around or move until he heard her footsteps back of him. Then he picked up the canoe and balanced it on his wide shoulders.

"You go first, please," he said, facing the river.

She gave a slight inclination of her head and proceeded him toward the water's edge. After he had placed the craft in the river he assisted her into it. Without a word they took the paddles and began to apply them.

They were headed down-stream, with the outlaw scanning the banks of the river, ever on the alert.

They paddled on and on, self-immured and silent as the sun rose higher in the east. To Ruth it seemed like paddling out of actuality into dreamland.

The surrounding forest was beautiful. There was the pleasant odor of pines. Here and there a playful fish jumped out of the clear water and back again. Alone they were—utterly alone in this quiet morning atmosphere.

The very quietness was suggestive of a world from which the last trace of human life had vanished.

When about two hours later they rounded a bend where the river widened into a lagoon and they caught sight of a calf-moose standing knee-deep in the water along the shore-line, the outlaw abruptly broke the silence that brooded about them.

He caught up the rifle, took deliberate aim, and sent the noise of his single shot echoing across the amber-tinted water. The moose, Ruth noticed, went down almost where it stood.

It brought home to her—and very uncomfortably so—the fact of her captor's marksmanship. Yes, he was a crack shot who never missed.

While she looked on the man pulled the moose out of the water and began dissecting him, cutting away the meat that was most desirable for food.

"We'll eat as soon as we can," he told her.

When they came to broken hills thick with birch and spruce, they disembarked and secreted the canoe and pushed up into the shelter of the woods.

Here they built a fire and roasted the meat.

"Do you know this country pretty well?" the man inquired suddenly.

"Not so well," she confessed. "Two years ago I camped here with a party of friends. It was on the Opanika river."

"Where is the Opanika?" he asked.

"It lies north of us, I believe," she said. "The Sissipuk river runs into it, farther on."

"But we seem to be traveling east," he objected.

"We are. Beyond is Cedar Lake, but we can not get into that without running the dangerous rapids." Ruth paused a moment, then added with a little enthusiasm: "I love to shoot the rapids."

"Do many campers shoot them?" the fugitive inquired anxiously.

"No. Only a few of them have nerve enough," she told him.

The man seemed to be debating. He knew that if they reached Cedar Lake without being caught, safety was assured. He did not speak again until they had finished eating and put out the fire.

"If you are ready, we'll start," he said.

Again they took to the water and paddled on. Presently they reached the rapids. The current caught them and they were swirling down the amber chutes stipped with foam.

They shot down long inclines of racing water

fighting for the right of way as they went on.

They veered and turned, and finally entered the lake. The outlaw mopped his face.

"That was a close shave, I'll tell the world," he exclaimed. "Once or twice I thought we would not get out alive."

"It wouldn't have made much difference," replied Ruth with a sob.

The man frowned. For a full minute he studied her lovely features and seemed to become uneasy as a tear dropped from her long lashes and left a wet trail on her soft cheek.

Once or twice he was about to speak, but each time he pressed his lips firmly together.

To the left was a bank of heavy boulders. They made for it, and found an ideal place to spend the night. Another fire was made, another meal eaten in complete silence, and again the padlock and chain were used.

When she suddenly broke into tears, he quickly removed the chain. With a few murmured words of apology he tossed it aside.

The man waited, furtively watching her.

"I hope you will sleep better to-night," he told her.

Ruth crept away and found a comfortable spot. As she was about to lay down, she noticed that her captor was lying with his back to her and with the rifle partly under his shoulder.

So she had no definite means of knowing when he was asleep.

She waited, acutely vigilant, until every restless small movement on his part had ceased. She waited still longer, watching the moon rise in its full splendor.

Then, with infinite caution, she rose to her hands and knees.

The movement, she thought, was noiseless. But

it brought the outlaw to a sitting posture with a jerk.

"I am thirsty," she said as quietly as she could. "I hope you won't mind if I go down to the lake for a drink of water."

"Alright, go ahead," he told her after a moment of silence. He even lay down again as she struggled to her feet. "You better be careful," he called over his shoulder. "Don't fall in."

Ruth made her movements, in picking her way down to the lake, as deliberate as possible.

She waded out until she stood knee-deep in the water. She pushed on until it reached her hips. Then she quietly subsided into its embracing chill, swimming softly forward until she was headed for the opposite shore.

She found it tiring, clothed as she was, to keep up for long that stealthy breast stroke. So she rested by swimming on her back, watching all the while the black-hooded cove from which she had stolen.

When she felt that she was far enough from shore she fell into a slow and leisured stroke that took her bobbing head closer and closer toward safety.

The chilliness of the water no longer troubled her for she remembered that liberty lay before her.

She would again achieve the dignity of directing her own movements. She would know again the joy of human freedom, whatever its perils. She would be alone to do as she wished.

And as she touched bottom and emerged from those cooling midnight waters she even felt that they had washed something hateful and unclean from her person.

Ruth found it hard to grope her way ashore, for a ledge of broken rock lay between her and the higher slope.

It was as she was pushing her way through an

opening between two of these barrier rocks that a hand clamped viselike on her wet wrist.

She screamed sharply. She tried to break away, but her struggles were of no avail.

And then she saw that it was the same man—Carter, the killer, Carter, the outlaw. Once more she made a desperate attempt to free her wrist. He uttered a low laugh.

"Let me go!" she begged.

He released her, breathing heavily. The rifle was held ready. He had been circling the lake while Ruth swam across it.

"That was a close shave," he said. "I could have put a bullet through your head, at any stage of the game. I saw every single movement of yours in the bright moonlight."

"Why didn't you?" she shrilled.

The fugitive failed to answer that question. But again he took a firm hold on her wrist.

"Come back," he commanded. "You are thoroughly wet and must be dried."

He led her back, through the forest, over rocks and through dense underbrush until she was glad to drop beside the fire and rest.

He gathered wood and fed the fire until it was a glowing blaze.

"You better dry those clothes, or you'll catch a cold," he told her.

Then he disappeared. Where he went, Ruth did not know, nor did she care. When the intense heat had penetrated to her body and she once more felt comfortably dry, she lay down in front of the fire.

She lay there in a listless inertia of frustration, neither fully asleep nor fully awake.

She was mistily in revolt against the repeated

mockeries of life that were reducing her to the mere brute and tied to the heels of an outlaw as unclean of body as he was of soul.

And finally she fell into a deep sleep. The next morning the fugitive awoke her not any too gentle.

"It is time for breakfast," he said, his eyes meeting hers with a peculiar expression in them. "This will be our last meal together."

"What do you mean?" she panted.

"I mean that I am gong to let you go back," he announced. "I have been thinking things over. It never got home to me, how much this was costing you until you tried to get away last night.

"I will divide with you what we have to eat. You can take the canoe and half the grub. You can have the rifle back, too.

"But," he went on with a grin, "I may as well tell you that I have emptied the magazine. I have tied up the shells in a neat package and I'll give them to you after you are in the canoe. This is a precaution I feel I must take for my own safety."

Ruth should have felt overjoyed, but she didn't. She ate very little breakfast, avoiding the man's constant stare.

Then they went down to the water's edge with the canoe and he placed her into it.

He expected her to take the paddle and get away from him as quickly as possible, but she made no move.

"You—you are not afraid to try it alone, are you?" he demanded.

"It is not the going back," she replied with a catch in her voice. "It is when I get there."

"You mean that husband of yours?" he said with a sudden hardening of the mouth.

She sat silent for a moment.

"Yes, that among other things," she finally acknowledged.

"Is he yellow?" was the outlaw's next question.

"No, but he is human," Ruth shot back. "And he is about as jealous as the average husband. But you—what are you going to do?"

Carter laughed.

"Oh, I'll push on until I get where I am headed for," he said. "It is a long ways from here."

Ruth's throat tightened a little at the unlooked for desolation in the man's voice. But she quickly concealed that feeling. She took up the paddles and made a slow move.

"By the way," he cried suddenly. "Do you want to see me get away or do you want to see me caught?"

She was thinking it over, apparently.

"It is not for me to judge," she told him.

He stood pondering over this, with his eyes on the ground.

"That is answer enough," he called after her as she propelled the canoe skillfully. His smile was one she could not quite understand. "Well, goodby and good luck."

"Goodby," replied the woman and noticed that the outlaw was fast disappearing among the rocks.

And now began her perilous journey back to her husband's camp. How far it was she scarcely knew. But up the river she paddled with all her strength.

When she got as far as the rapids she took the frail craft out of the water and carried it on her young, strong shouldlers.

After she reached the elevation she again took to the river. All day long she toiled ceaselessly—earnestly.

At noon she stopped to eat and drink, without resorting to the luxury of a fire. The outlaw had been

thoughtful and kind enough to supply her with meat already broiled.

And he had wrapped some matches and what little bread they had left in the same package.

The sun was still high when she came to a mid-stream island. There she bathed and washed her clothing, piece by piece and then prepared sleeping quarters for the night.

Ruth slept the drugged sleep of utter fatigue. She awoke, chilled, with the dawn still gray in the east.

Before the sun had risen above the horizon she was again headed up the river.

She had expected her spirits to lighten, as she penetrated deeper and deeper into that home territory.

But, as she emerged from the fringe of the wilderness and caught sight of objects already familiar, she found that a settled mood of anxiety had taken possession of her.

Her husband would demand a full explanation for her prolonged absence from their camp. Her story would be easy enough to tell, but would he believe it?

Chapter 102

OUTLAW AND HUSBAND

THERE WAS indeed cause for Ruth Fillmore's mental uneasiness, for she knew Guy's weak spots. The most pronounced of these was his natural inclination to jealousy. Having spent two nights alone with an outaw in the wilderness of the forest was something that could not be explained satisfactorily unless her husband's faith in her was still unshaken.

And so, troubled with grave apprehension, the young wife trudged on wearily. It was late in the afternoon when she caught sight of the two tents she knew so well.

She saw her husband pacing back and forth, with his eyes on the ground. As she called to him, an uncontrollable tremulo of excitement in her voice, she could see the pacing figure stop short. But no answering call came.

Ruth did not hurry her steps. But her shouldlers stiffened as she swung into the trodden path that led between the two tents beyond which the camp-fire burned.

The next instant she stood before her husband. His face impressed her as being almost as white as the tent walls.

"You—you don't seem very glad to see me," she said, realizing the inadequacy of her words as she uttered them.

The silence between them was prolonged and tragical.

"I am not," finally retorted Guy. "I'd rather they

brought you in dead."

She dropped her rifle at that and stood with her fingers clasped tightly together. She knew only too well what he meant by saying that.

He took it for granted that she had become the outlaw's victim.

"You don't suppose I would have come back," she said with her heartbeats making her voice shake, "if what you think were true."

Her husband dropped away a step or two.

"I know what has happened," he told her with a gesture that re-echoed the horror in his eyes. "It doesn't take very long for a thing like that to travel. An old Indian saw you. And an officer of the mounted police saw you."

Ruth shrank back.

"You—you don't believe that I—I——"

Her husband stopped her short with a gesture.

"Don't try to deny it!" he cried, wringing his hands. "That outlaw carted you about as if you were his camp blanket. You traveled together, you ate together, and you slept together. Oh, God, why couldn't you have killed yourself before it came to that?"

The woman stood, wide-eyed and stunned, before his stare of loathing.

She felt the need of being patient — yes, very patient, for that black madness of his—that terrible jealousy, was born of love.

"Did you kill him?" Guy suddenly asked, glancing at the rifle where it lay on the ground.

"No," she answered with flat listlessness.

"Then I'll get him and kill him!" her husband shouted, trembling with fury. "That man must not be allowed to live after what he has done to you. Someone must kill him!"

"But I want you to listen to me," Ruth cried, advancing as the other retreated.

"Good God, do you think a thing lilke that can be explained away?" he demanded. "No, it can't be done. Don't even make the attempt, for I would not believe a word you say!"

Ruth did not answer him. Instead her vacant stare seemed to go over and beyond him.

She stood suddenly immobile, suddenly indifferent to her husband's anger, with her fingers pressed closely against her parted lips, as though in the act of stifling a word to which she dared not give utterance.

When at last a sound did come from her, it was in the form of a short scream.

For striding out of the jungle she saw a bearded man with hollow cheeks. She recognized him instantly. It was the outlaw, Carter, who had carried her away and held her captive for two days and nights.

She saw him emerge out of the shadows with a quick and snake-like quietness that could not be misjudged as he swiftly seized her husband by the neck and flung him backward.

"You damned fool!" the outlaw snarled, his bloodshot eyes on the smooth brown cheek of Fillmore. "You ought to get a bullet through you for a play like this. I never saw anything so rotten. What kind of a husband are you, anyway?"

Fillmore made no immediate answer. He merely backed away a little, followed step by step by the outlaw.

Guy did not have to be told who this uncouth and wild-looking individual was. The horrified expression on his wife's face explained it.

"Well, I am mighty glad I came back here," Carter proclaimed, keeping his revolver leveled. "You," with an ugly grin at Guy, "are her husband. I had a

hunch that you would feel sorry for yourself, when you ought to be feeling sorry for her."

Something like a hiss came from between Fillmore's lips.

"Hasn't that woman seen about enough of you?" he demanded, his voice heavy with hate.

"Not by a long shot!" came back quickly. "Not until we get this thing straight. I suppose she tried to explain, and you would not believe her. Well, you better believe me!"

The outlaw looked over his shoulder toward Ruth who was quietly moving away from the fire-light to where the fallen rifle lay.

"Come here, you!" he commanded.

She obeyed instantly and stepped over to her husband's side. For a full minute the outlaw studied her face before speaking.

"Tell him what happened," he ordered.

"He has been told everything there is any need to tell," she contended, her features dreadfully white.

"No, not by a damned sight," exclaimed her abductor. "This fool husband of yours insinuates that you have not come back to him the same woman you went away. He is not big enough to believe you."

Guy Fillmore moved forward with his fists clenched.

"I have heard all about you!" he cried out with a sudden release of pent-up passion. "It is you I could not believe in. You, damn you, who are nothing but a murderer of your own kind, without a human instinct in your dirty body!"

The outaw fell away a step or two, his brow knitted. He seemed to be debating with himself as to his reply.

Continued in next number

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